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SUBJECT: CODEL WARNER MEETING AT MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

Classified By: ACTING POLMIL COUNS Evan G. Reade for
reasons 1.4 (a) and (d)

I1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a meeting March 21 with
CODEL Warner, Defense Ministry's Lieutenant
General Nasir Abadi reported the Iraqi military
is making great progress and increasingly
taking the lead in field operations.
He took exception to CODEL Warner's suggestion
that ethno-sectarian violence poses a greater
threat to Iraq than terrorism and denied that
Iraq is headed toward a civil war. He assured
the CODEL that the Iraqi Army is in control
of Baghdad, including Sadr City. While
admitting militias are a threat,
Abadi stressed that efforts are being made
to integrate them into the Iraqi Security Forces
(ISF). He also believes that as the ISF
gains the confidence of the people and the
economy picks up, the militias will "go away."
When asked what he sees as the primary challenges
to securing Iraq, Abadi pointed to the
police forces and the judicial system.
END SUMMARY.

Iraqi Military Making Great Strides

I2. (SBU) On March 21, 2006, Sen. John Warner
(R-VA), Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI), Sen. Jeff Sessions
(R-AL), Sen. Jesse Bingaman (D-NM), Sen. Craig
Thomas (R-WY), and Sen. Ken Salazar (D-CO)
called on Commander of the Iraqi Joint Forces
LTG Nasir Abadi. Sen. Warner began by
noting that most U.S. news coverage on
Iraq is negative and increasing numbers of
Americans want our forces to withdraw
from Iraq sooner rather than later. Abadi
responded by focusing on what he believes
are the positive developments. He outlined
the progress being made by the Iraqi Armed
Forces in terms of training, leading
operations, and occupying their own battle
space. He stressed that most of Iraq is
secure, as fourteen of the eighteen
provinces are considered safe. Abadi said
the Ministry of Defense (MoD) stands ready
for the USG to draw down a substantial number
of troops by the end of the year.

State of Ethno-Sectarian Violence

¶3. (SBU) Sen. Warner asked Abadi what he thought of U.S. CENTCOM Commanding General Abizaid's recent statement that ethno-sectarian violence is a source of greater concern than the insurgency in Iraq. Abadi responded that the media is exaggerating the situation. The real problems faced by Iraqis are not sectarian, but al-Qaida elements who are trying to foment civil war. They are the ones responsible for such acts of terror as the Samarra mosque bombing that led to reprisal attacks against Sunni Arabs and their religious sites. He further surmised that a civil war is not likely in Iraq as all the major Iraqi tribes consist of both Sunni and Shia. Abadi described how Sunni and Shia live together as neighbors in many parts of Iraq. Many Iraqi families have intermarried, meaning that Sunni and Shia live under the same roofs. He, himself, is a Sunni-Shia from a mixed village in the south.

State of Baghdad Violence

¶4. (SBU) When asked if the violence in Baghdad is out of control as reported in the media, Abadi responded no. He claimed violence raged in parts of the city immediately after the bombing of the Samarra mosque, but now things are returning to normal. He said crime statistics kept by Ministry of Interior (MoI) bear this out. Abadi went on to stress that the Iraqi Army is in complete control of Baghdad, including Sadr City, and mans 136 checkpoints on the periphery of Baghdad and 112 within Baghdad. When asked if the army works well with the police, Abadi said cooperation and coordination are improving.

Status of Militias

¶5. (SBU) Sen. Levin asked Abadi about the threat posed by militias. Abadi replied militias are a concern, particularly Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). However, he was confident that the ISF and Coalition Forces (CF) are strong enough to handle any problems that might arise from the militias. He further believes that as the economy picks up and people gain confidence in the ISF, militias will go away.

Challenges to a Secure Iraq

¶6. (SBU) When asked what were the major challenges to creating a secure Iraq, Abadi pointed to the police service and the judicial system. He stated the police are under trained, overwhelmed and need much more Coalition supervision. He is hopeful that in this year, the Year of the Police as announced by Commanding General Casey, the necessary training, equipment, and mentorship will be provided to bring the police up to standard. Abadi sees the judicial system as "broken." He went on to describe Iraqi judges as corrupt, incompetent, and easily intimidated. He opined that the judicial system is slow

in investigating and prosecuting MoD cases, and that in general, Ministry of Justice (MoJ) officials are uncooperative partners in security.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Abadi's comments about the state of Baghdad security, ethno-sectarian violence, and militias were overly optimistic. He somewhat misled the CODEL when he stated the Iraqi Army is in charge of Baghdad, as this simply is not the case. Responsibility for patrolling different sectors of Baghdad is shared among MoD, MoI, and MNF-I forces. And security in Sadr City remains problematic with the presence of JAM.

¶8. (SBU) Several of the senators were disappointed that MinDef Dulime did not host the meeting, and were further mystified to find the Ministry building practically empty of staff during the middle of the work week. When Sen. Warner asked why the place was like a "mausoleum", EmbOff explained it was a holiday for both Shia and Kurds. Warner did not seem to accept this as rationale, responding that Iraq is in the middle of a war and those at the heart of its defense establishment should not be taking days off.

¶9. (SBU) CODEL Warner did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing Iraq.

KHALILZAD